

7 July 2014



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## **Reference CAS-2695103-C6YSMP**

Dear Ms Roski, Complaints Advisor,

### **Complaint: BBC Asian Network references to “white parents”**

I am writing to request that the Editorial Standards Committee review the decision, by Complaints Director Colin Tregear on 17 June 2014.

As you will see from the correspondence related to the case, the National Secular Society presented clear evidence supporting our complaint that the BBC Asian Network’s coverage and framing of this story was in breach of the BBC’s editorial guidance – sections: 4.2.1, 4.4.12, 6.2.1 and 6.4.1.

I am concerned that – while expressing “some sympathy with (our) point of view” – Mr Tregear has not addressed the substantive points of our objections. Given that our complaint cited specific sections of the BBC’s editorial guidance I would have expected the response to have addressed these directly. I would like an explanation of how the BBC believes its editorial guidance was upheld by the coverage and framing of the report.

### **Our objections under 4.2.1 and 4.4.12**

Mr Tregear appears to have attempted to avoid editorial responsibility for the way the story was framed, by suggesting that it is routine to identify when the subjects of news reports are not Asians.

It is trivial to demonstrate that this is not always the case. When I have listened to and followed the BBC Asian Network, non-Asians have often been the subject of and contributors to a wide variety of stories. In no other circumstance have I been aware of these subjects or contributors being identified by their race.

This leaves open the question of why in this case the subjects of the story were identified by their race. We believe it was to mistakenly and misleadingly frame the

debate in racial terms. The response to our complaint offers no alternative reasoning which stands up to the most basic of scrutiny.

We also note that on 3 July 2014 BBC Asian Network (5pm Asian Network Reports) reported on children being allocated places at the Hindu Avanti Court Primary School against their parents' wishes. Some of the parents objecting were white, but not one reference to their skin colour was made. The report also references its earlier report about Khalsa Academy (the subject of this complaint) and instead of referring to the parents as "white parents", referred to them correctly as "non-Sikhs".

This would suggest to us that, despite a refusal within the BBC complaints process to acknowledge it, BBC Asian network does in fact recognise that mistakes were made in the coverage and framing of the earlier report (in which skin colour was not an issue) – and lessons may have been learned.

### **BBC Asian Network's audience**

We believe that framing the issue in terms of race rather than religious freedom let down the Network's audience. It is an insult to the intelligence of the BBC Asian Network listeners to suggest that they needed to be informed of the irrelevant factor of the race of the parents in order to understand the story.

Even if some minority of the audience would have taken "non-Sikh" to mean Hindu or Muslim, this would still have been a less biased framing of the story, as it would remain clear that this was a religious freedom rather than a racial issue.

The issue of state funding for religious schools and its implications for religious freedom and community cohesion is of interest to many communities in the UK, including the Asian community. Especially given the increase in Hindu, Sikh and Muslim schools, which the Asian community is divided on – as the report itself demonstrated.

The BBC Asian Network's target audience is under 35, this age group are more likely than others to get their news and engage with content from the BBC primarily through Twitter. This is one of the reasons that we specifically mentioned the tweets, sent by the network and members of the production team. The tweets sent a message without the context of the pre-recorded news item.

### **Our objections under 6.2.1 and 6.4.1**

I remain unconvinced that I or the other contributors were dealt with honestly or with respect. We gave our consent to contribute to a news segment on a religious freedom and education issue. Had I known this would be inaccurately framed as a race issue, with the associated insinuation, I would have been much more reluctant to take part. At the very least I would have ensured our contribution addressed the inaccurate and misleading framing of the story.

After raising my concerns about the misleading framing of the story in the lunchtime bulletin, Ushma Mistry led me to believe that the inappropriate references to the race of the parents would be removed when the story was rerun in the evening bulletin. This was not the case and I was not informed why.

I look forward to receiving your response.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Evans

Campaigns Manager  
National Secular Society